

Opening Day Remarks
2014 Regular Session | January 15, 2014
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Senate Minority Leader

Senate President Kim, Governor Abercrombie, distinguished former State Senators, guests and overburdened taxpayers of Hawaii, on behalf of the entire Senate Minority, Aloha! The inclusion of our past Senators, in this our 55th anniversary year of Statehood, and the publication of a book of memories, is most welcome.

History, experience and perspective should be important reminders to us as we move forward. Otherwise, we are bound to repeat past mistakes.

Let me acknowledge the passing at the end of December, of Hawaii's greatest fiscal watchdog, and the taxpayers' best friend, Mr. Lowell Kalapa of the Tax Foundation of Hawaii. Lowell will be missed during this Session. He helped all of us understand the consequences of government fiscal actions. Many of us are glad that 2013 is behind us, because the year did not live up to expectations of change or measurable improvement and was difficult for our local families and small businesses.

Let me say that I was advised to keep my remarks "light" today and refrain from being too "hard hitting." Light? That's not in my DNA. We have serious problems in Hawaii that too many choose to ignore or deny. We must confront and solve them so we can have a better Hawaii for all our citizens. My professional experience and discussions with real people in the marketplace, tell me, despite what some politicians say, Hawaii has not turned an economic corner, our economy has not rebounded, and across the board we are still struggling. Recently, the State Council on Revenues reduced its economic growth projections from 4.1% to 3.3%.

From my perspective, we have become a nation, and a state, of entitlement. Our work incentive, our American individual exceptionalism, have been eroded by a growing clamor by those who think they are entitled to the fruits of other peoples' labors.

Last week, we noted the 50th anniversary of President Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty." It is another war, similar to international conflicts and the "war on drugs," that cost much, but wars we have not won. Since 1964, more than \$21 trillion has been transferred in the U.S. from some taxpayers to others thought to be "entitled." In 1964, approximately 14% of Americans were classified by government as being below the "poverty level." Today, it is more than 21%. Clearly, government is moving in the wrong direction, creating more poverty.

Money thrown at a problem does not bring positive results. Money without a sound, workable plan and able leadership, results in more failure.

Consider:

- Our state's existing \$25 billion unfunded liability.
- Providing more subsidies with lack of oversight to our largest energy monopoly, which keeps increasing electricity rates, and experimenting with wind turbines, and undersea cables, instead of deregulating to help consumers.
- Allowing even higher salaries, benefits and \$10 million more to a deficit ridden UH athletics program. A UH that is proud to have "52% of the students able to graduate in 6 years?"
- Spending nearly a million dollars on a "Pono Choices" sex program to teach 11 and 12 year olds how to have sex?
- Proposing a 36% pay raise for the Chief Elections Officer who failed miserably during the last election.
- Raising motor vehicle fees and taxes while not repairing roads and potholes? Are you serious?
- Using \$204 million to create a flawed Hawaii Health Connector for Obamacare?
- Funding a study on "Global Warming" while the streets, highways and streams of Hawaii are littered with trash and sewage. Are you serious?

Members of the public, who pay our salaries, are fed up. They demand we listen to them and change. We better do so, starting today.

Taxpayer expenditures for welfare and social services exceed expenditures for government education. We must refuse to support those who choose not to work or are financially irresponsible. Leading the nation in food stamps, and welfare subsidies, and being among the top for homelessness, are not badges of honor.

During the Not So Special-Special Session on same sex marriage held in November, 10,000 people came to the State Capitol. Many weren't registered to vote. Few had been to their Capitol before. In the end, nearly all were disappointed, frustrated, or angry because of the perceived arrogance of their representatives. They felt betrayed.

"Let the People Decide!" was their cry.

Article 1, Section 1 of the Hawaii State Constitution says, "All political power of this state is inherent in the people and the responsibility or the exercise thereof rests with the people. All government is founded on this authority."

It seems many in government have forgotten that we derive our power from the people.

A state without accountability and lack of consequences sets a dangerous precedent. We need meaningful change and must provide consequences for bad behavior and poor performance in government.

Every year, the Senate Minority has introduced legislation providing the people more empowerment and choices, as well as greater government transparency. This year, we again have introduced measures to allow for Initiative, Referendum, Recall and Term Limits. Hopefully, the people will become more engaged so the Majority will at least hear these measures.

Hawaii requires True Economic Development. Instead of artificially forcing entry and training wages up, and taxing and regulating small business further, we must listen to our local job creators and incentivise them. Those in government who have never met a private payroll shouldn't be giving their failed advice to businesses and adding more taxes, regulations and employer mandates.

We say everything we do here is "for the keiki." But is it? With sexual assaults and harm to our children increasing, and more evidence of human trafficking of minors, Hawaii needs more meaningful protection of our keiki. We should start with adoption of Jessica's Law and harsher penalties for those who hurt or endanger our children.

Our skies may become crowded with drones and unmanned devices. We welcome their positive use but must be vigilant with unlawful government or law enforcement use that violates 4th Amendment Constitutional guarantees. We shouldn't condone NSA-type spying on law abiding citizens.

I pledge my efforts to support good legislation regardless of who introduces it; to analyze and report honestly on the impact of all bills, to work towards ending Legislative exemptions and to boost transparency.

Let us celebrate our individual, God-given liberty and our ability to change for the better.

Our goal, as I outlined last Session, is not a "New Day," but, A Better Day. This is not a partisan position. We can navigate a different course. Turn that State Government canoe into the wind and explore the greatness that Hawaii can be. For, We, The People.

God Bless Hawaii, our men and women in the armed forces, and the United States of America. Aloha and Mahalo